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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9169
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RHEHWSR/WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000206

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/19/2017

TAGS: PGOV PINR I2

SUBJECT: PRT TIKRIT: LOCAL POLITICIANS VIEW PRESIDENT BUSH'S NEW WAY FORWARD AS INCOMPLETE STRATEGY

REF: BAGHDAD 15

Classified by Stephanie Miley, PRT Team Leader, for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Tikrit, Salah ad Din cable.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY. Salah ad Din (SaD) Deputy Governor Abdullah Ajbarah and other engaged local politicians termed President's Bush "New Way Forward in Iraq," as outlined in his January 10 speech, as a "military solution to a political problem." Additional troops on the ground, they surmised, would only lead to additional unnecessary losses. Ajbarah welcomed Bush's public support for movement on de-ba'athification, provincial elections, and amendment of the Constitution, but questioned the GOI's political will to reform. They said they felt as if there was an underlying assumption in the President's speech that the Sunnis were the problem and no blame was put on the GOI's current leadership.

In their understanding, Iran's interference has created the current political chaos in Iraq by promoting sectarian leadership of Iraq's government. This government has in turn allowed sectarian militias and violence to spin out of control. They called for balance in the Iraqi political process, which they surmised would only come from fundamental changes in the Constitution and the electoral process. PRT interlocutors asserted that the electoral system should be changed from a list-based system to a district-based one where candidates are directly elected to offices or positions. The Salah ad Din Sunnis are skeptical as to what extent a Shia-dominated central government will implement political reforms that would result in bringing Sunnis back into the political fold. END SUMMARY.

Listening to Local Politicians

¶3. (C) Salah ad Din (SaD) Deputy Governor Abdullah Ajbarah and a separate January 16 PRT-initiated political roundtable with Provincial Council (PC) member Dhamin Ulaiwi Mutlag, PC member and President of Tikrit University Dr. Maher, Action Committee Secretary Dr. Nuri Mohammad Dhahir, SaD IIP representative Hashem Jihad, and local politicians Johar Hamad Haham and Dr. Turki Mohammed (all Sunni Arabs) expressed their views on President Bush's "New Way Forward in Iraq" as outlined in his January 10, 2007 speech. In addition, several other PC members made side-bar comments to PRT officers.

Military Solution to a Political Problem

¶4. (C) The Deputy Governor and several roundtable participants termed the President's "New Way Forward in Iraq"

a "military solution to a political problem." They said they were surprised at the new strategy as it seemed to be "an acceleration in the same direction" rather than a genuine "change to the strategy in Iraq," which they had thought was the President's goal in reviewing the USG's policy. Asserting that the President was right to be concerned about security in Baghdad, they disagreed with the President's logic explaining why previous attempts to secure the capital had failed. They attributed the deplorable security situation to the GOI's lack of political will, rather than from insufficient troop levels and military restrictions. They said they have no reason to believe that Prime Minister al Maliki has the will or political capital to inspire success in securing Baghdad, especially in a non-sectarian manner. They suggested the highest levels of the government are involved in sectarian militias and that under Bush's plan there would be no way to address the issue. Additional troops on the ground, they surmised would only lead to additional unnecessary loses.

¶15. (C) SaD Sunnis argued that the political initiatives mentioned in the speech, while important, did not address the fundamental problems in the current political process. They said it was impossible for a balanced political process to come out of the current sectarian-based system, as there were no moderate and secular options available.

¶16. (C) Ajbarah welcomed Bush's push for movement on de-ba'athification, provincial elections, and amendment of the Constitution. However, upon seeing a draft of the de-ba'athification law and recent newspaper announcements requiring de-ba'athification exception seekers to travel to Baghdad for processing (which he considers a major security problem), he said he was not convinced the GOI was serious

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about reforms in spite of the President's comments. He further called for the Ba'ath Party to be allowed to participate in the political process, the same as other political parties. The Deputy Governor also suggested the electoral system be changed from a list-based system to a district-based one where individual candidates are elected to office.

Iran: The Source of the Problem

¶17. (C) Political roundtable participants said that the President's mentioning of "Sunni extremists" and omissions of the GOI's complicity in the current violence sent the overall message that the Sunnis were the cause of Iraq's problems. They countered this assertion by saying that Iran is the source of most of Iraq's sectarianism. Iran, they submitted, has taken control of key elements of the senior GOI leadership and these relationships have allowed for the establishment of sectarian militias. They also suggested that the Coalition Force's hesitancy to taken Shia militias is passive support. They concluded that Bush's plan for "eventual demobilization" of militias was insufficient, as it would be impossible to secure Baghdad and not deal with militias.

The End State

¶18. (C) The roundtable participants unanimously agreed that President Bush's desired end state of a "functioning democracy that polices its territory, upholds rule of law, respects fundamental liberties, and answers to its people" is not possible in the current political process or with the current GOI leaders. As suggested reftel, they support the election of a strong, secular leader and a "salvation" government with no sectarian affiliations to national government. They said the population needs education before

it can handle democracy, and the interference of region powers needs to be curbed.

President Bush's Responsibility

¶9. (C) The roundtable participants also commented that it was "frustrating" that President Bush said the "responsibility rests with (him)," but that he is now leaving it to an incapable Iraqi government to fix.

Comment

¶10. (C) The Salah ad Din Sunnis are looking for a voice in the national political process, which they perceive to be dominated by a Shia central government uninterested in Sunni concerns. Since the President's speech calls for the GOI to implement political reforms but offers no mechanism to enforce this, many in Salah ad Din do not expect tangible changes will be forthcoming. It is clear that security is important to the SaD Sunnis, but they want more. They want a significant role in the national decision-making process.
END COMMENT.

¶11. (U) For additional reporting from PRT Tikrit, Salah ad Din, please see our SIPRNET Reporting Blog:
<http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Tikrit>.

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